

Garamendi calls for fee caps

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With student fee increases each year, tuition at University of California and California State University campuses has almost doubled in the past six years, threatening to make higher education a luxury in the state.

Last week, Lt. Gov. John Garamendi called for the freezing of student fees, which have risen by 90 percent for CSUs and 110 percent at UCs over the last 13 years, despite the rising cost of living in California.

"Enough is enough," Garamendi, who sits on the CSU Board of Trustees and the UC Board of Regents, said in an op-ed piece for the Los Angeles Times.

Garamendi wants student fees to be stabilized at current levels, with no increases allowed except to keep up with inflation.

At the same time, student groups are speaking out against fee increases, filing the first student-led ballot initiative with the attorney general.

A group known as Students and Families for Tuition Relief Now is organizing on every campus in the state and hopes to have their proposition on the November 2008 ballot.

The proposal would freeze fees for five years for resident undergraduates at UCs and CSUs, and any future increases would not be allowed to surpass inflation levels. A one percent tax on income over \$1 million would raise new revenue for the college system and would require administrators at these public universities to report to a panel of students and parents on how the money is being spent.

These initiatives come at a critical time in the future for California's higher education system, which released its budgets only a few days ago.

Garamendi said he worries about the potentially tough budget cycle this year, with state revenues falling flat and a looming deficit as high as \$10 billion.

"We have been slowly shifting the cost of running our public universities from the public at large to students and their families," Garamendi said.

In a press conference last Wednesday, Garamendi expressed concern that the privatization of universities was already underway.

"In 1990, we received \$15,000 per student from public funds," Garamendi said. "Today it's \$10,000, and students pay nearly a third of the total money at UCs. We have to change this if we are to continue to have a robust growing economy in which every Californian can participate."

San Diego State lobbies on behalf of students through Associated Students, which has not advocated a fee increase for CSUs.

A.S. President James Poet said that students at CSUs get a great education for the price, but that tuition should not be increased.

"The mission statement of the CSU advocates access, which has a lot to do with the fees we pay," Poet said.

Garamendi took the same approach on Wednesday, pointing out that the increase of student fees closes the door on many students who wish to go to college, but can't afford it.

"Students take out a very large amount of loans (to fund their education) or don't even try to go to school because of the cost," Garamendi said.

He said that when residents choose not to attend college, they impact the economy of the entire state, which benefits from high numbers of college graduates. For every \$1 spent on public universities in the state, \$3 comes back.

"College graduates would be paying 60 to 80 percent more in taxes immediately after graduation," Garamendi said.

Last Tuesday, the budget for CSUs was sent to the governor with an implicit 10 percent increase in student fees, and the UC budget was submitted Thursday with a 7.5 percent increase written in.

Garamendi said it will be a long fight, but he and the CSU Board of Trustees and the UC Board of Regents are willing to fight.

"We have to make sure that universities are publicly funded and available to every student that has the intellect and educational background," Garamendi said.